

Testimony of Prof. David Blitz relative to HB 5300
March 8, 2022

I am a Professor at CCSU with 33 years experience and Chair of the Faculty Advisory Committee to the Board of Higher Education. I have been an ex-officio, non-voting member of the Board since March of 2020 and have attended all meetings of the Board since, as well as all those of its Finance/Infrastructure Committee. I want to speak in favor of HB 5300 on modifying Section 185 of the state statutes to require legislative approval for merging, closing or consolidation of institutions within the Connecticut State Colleges and University System (CSCU).

At the outset I want to state that if the consolidation of the community colleges proposed by the Board were to go through despite five years of faculty and staff opposition, the legislature would in any case be required to take action, in particular to modify subsection 10a-1 which states: "There shall be a state system of public higher education to consist of (1) The University of Connecticut and all *campuses* thereof, and (2) the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities, which include (A) the state universities, which shall be known collectively as the Connecticut State University System, (B) the *regional community-technical colleges*, which shall be known collectively as the *regional community-technical college system*, and (C) Charter Oak State College. "*Constituent units*" as used in the general statutes means those units in subdivisions (1) and (2) of this section." (emphasis added)

If the 12 community colleges were to be merged into the one, currently non-accredited Connecticut State Community Colleges as proposed by the ill-conceived and misnamed "Students First" proposal, the terms "regional community-technical colleges" and "regional community-technical college system" in part (2B) would have to be replaced, and the term "constitutuent units" as referring to the 12 currently accredited community colleges would be inapplicable, as they would have been reduced to "campuses" as part (1) refers to the University of Connecticut campuses.

As is well known, several years ago, UConn closed its Torrington campus, to the dismay of local and regional residents and over their opposition, based mainly on a financial consideration of the costs of maintenance and refurbishment of buildings. As a resident of Colebrook who passes by Northwest Community College every day on my way to CCSU, I am concerned that without legislative oversight over closures, mergers and consolidation the same could happen there -- or to any other currently existing college --, if not under the current Board, then in the unforeseeable future under conditions we cannot currently predict.

Based on my experience of two years on the Board of Regents, I am not persuaded that the Board would critically examine a proposal to close a community college once it has been reduced to the status of a campus. This would be no more, as was the case for UConn/Torrington, of quantitative considerations such as closing buildings that are expensive to maintain, without consideration of the qualitative value of the college to its students, faculty, staff, alumni, and residents of surrounding communities. What Students First proposes is an unnecessary de-localisation and consequent over-centralization of administration, which will be both expensive in terms of transition costs and counter-productive of academic initiatives. I do not propose that the legislature meddle in affairs internal to the constituent units or policies other than merger, closing or consolidation. But the very existence of community colleges anchored in their localities and regions rises to the level at which legislative oversight is clearly needed.